

# The Fostering Network



Llywodraeth Cymru  
Welsh Government

## First Educators

Our role in raising the educational aspirations and outcomes of looked after children and young people

**EVERY CHILD • EVERY CARER • EVERY DAY**

***Our vision is that all children in  
foster care enjoy the very best  
life chances and have the  
opportunity to achieve their full  
potential***

## **What we will cover**

- ***Exploring the role of foster carers as first educators***
- ***Getting involved and working with the wider educational team***
- ***Navigating the system***
- ***Innovation and learning from The Fostering Network***

## What are the facts?

- What does the data tell us about educational outcomes for looked after children?
- Education, Education, Education...
- Formal and informal education
- Foster Carers as first educators
- Creating a learning environment
- Keys to success for foster carers: being informed, feeling confident, actively engaging

**“it was the educational encouragement and support that foster carers offered that were important, rather than their educational qualifications per se”  
(Rees Centre, 2015)**

# **Why is education so important for looked after children and young people?**

- Provides greater impact on their sense of identity
- Can provide a level of stability and control that is missing from every other aspect of their lives
- In the midst of insecurity and uncertainty about where they will live, where they belong, who they can trust and what the future holds, school can provide familiar faces, routines and welcome predictability.
- Improve confidence, self esteem and social skills
- Reduce levels of stress and improve resilience

## Foster Carers as First Educators

- ✓ Shared value - learning and exploring
- ✓ Messaging and language – counteracting the impact of ‘labels’
- ✓ Instilling positive attitudes to education, nurturing aspirations and maintaining high expectations which can lay the foundations to success in later life

**Exercise – Think about your experience of the education system, good and bad. How might this influence your attitude and actions to promoting the educational needs of children and young people you look after?**



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# Understanding learning

- ✓ Learning styles – tailoring and adapting
- ✓ Share your learning – the power of learning together
- ✓ Creating a learning environment



# Learning styles – tailoring and adapting

**Visual**  
SEE IT



**Auditory**  
HEAR IT



**Kinesthetic**  
DO IT



## Learning Styles

Generally we learn  
through our senses  
in three ways:





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# Share your learning- the power of learning together

- ✓ 'Give of yourself' – being a learner not an educator
- ✓ Power of shared learning or letting a child take the lead
- ✓ Practical tip: 'The Common Third'
- ✓ Have fun!



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# Creating a learning environment

- ✓ Classroom environments
- ✓ Ongoing learning
- ✓ Looking at the everyday differently
- ✓ Partnership with teachers/DTs
- ✓ Informal education and after school' – finding a route into learning
- ✓ Education and stress – removing the links

# Navigating the system

## Primary School

**Foundation Phase** - Nursery to Year 2 ages 3 -7 years old

**Key Stage 2** - Year 3 to Year 6 ages 8 -11 years old

## Secondary School

**Key Stage 3** - Year 7 to Year 9 ages 11-14 years old

**Key Stage 4** - Years 10 and 11 ages 14 -16 years old

**Post-16** -Years 12 and 13 ages 16 -18 years old



## Getting the right school

Stability is important for looked after children, so unless there are good reasons, it is best for them to continue to attend the school they already go to when they are first placed with you. However, changing school is sometimes unavoidable and this could be because they are:

- Entering the education system for the first time or at a transition age
- Newly arrived in the county/country.
- At risk in some way and need to be made safe.
- Placed at a distance where it is not practical to continue at the same school.

# Pupil Referral Units (PRU's)

- ✓ Pupil Referral Units (PRUs) – what you need to know and why we have them
- ✓ Short-term or long-term option?
- ✓ Identifying learning needs
- ✓ Outside of the classroom – holistic approach to identifying and supporting needs



## Assessment and Reporting

- ✓ Throughout their time in school, children and young people should be assessed regularly and the outcomes reported to you.
- ✓ Year 2- 8, annual reading and numeracy testing.
- ✓ Annual reports will continue in secondary school.
- ✓ At the end of Key Stage 3 (Year 9) teacher assessments are undertaken in all subjects.
- ✓ In Key Stage 4, young people will be taking GCSEs, or other appropriate courses. They will get the results of these in the August after they have completed compulsory education.

# Plans, programmes and support

## Personal Education Plan (PEP)

- Every looked after child must have a PEP, which will be an integral part of their overall care and support plan.
- Must be initiated before the young person becomes looked after, except in an emergency placement when the PEP should be initiated within 10 working days.
- Must have been developed and be available for the first statutory review meeting of the care and support plan, 28 days after becoming looked after.



## Designated Lead Member of Staff for LAC

- Legal obligations for specialist LAC staff support
- Understanding the structure and who you can go to
- Educational and pastoral – relationship with the child and with you
- Two –way flow of information
- Our support to designated teachers

Dylan, the child I care for, was struggling in school and some of the teachers didn't seem to understand his needs. I decided to speak to the school's designated member of staff to get more help for him. Establishing a good relationship with her was the best thing I could have done. I shared my concerns with her and we then discussed how best to tackle them. She was then better able to help other teachers to better understand Dylan's needs, and perhaps helped relieve some of my worries.





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## Enrichment

“Successful Futures” emphasises the importance of rich experiences being integral to the curriculum and to deep learning.

Schools are being asked to work with a wide range of partners, to develop a breadth of opportunities and activities that expand horizons within and beyond the traditional learning environment of the classroom.

Key to this is about finding more effective ways to deliver the curriculum, communicate high expectations, raising an individual’s aspirations and ambitions to succeed in everything they choose to do.

(<http://gov.wales/docs/dcells/publications/150225-successful-futures-en.pdf>)



## Relationships and attachment

- The social dimension of education – ‘social competence’ and boundaries
- Role-modelling strong relationships and attachment
- The importance of play
- Attachment and learning



# When a child has additional learning needs (SEN)

- ✓ National framework: SEN Code of Practice for Wales.
- ✓ A child or young person has a special educational need if **‘they have a significantly greater difficulty in learning than the majority of children of the same age,’** or **‘have a disability which prevents or hinders them from making use of the educational facilities provided for children of the same age.’**
- ✓ Entitlement to specialist provision (includes pre-school)



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# Identifying and addressing SEN?

- ✓ The role of the teacher
- ✓ Your role
- ✓ Special Educational Needs Co-ordinator (SENCO)
- ✓ External expertise



## Statement of Special Educational Needs (SSEN)

Legally binding document that details a child or young person's learning needs and the provision necessary to meet them, including the school they should attend. (SEN Code of Practice for Wales.)

### **If a local authority decides not to**

- conduct a Statutory Assessment,
- issue a Statement,
- or if you are unhappy with the contents of either Parts 2, 3 and/or 4 of the Statement,

You have a right to appeal to the Special Educational Needs Tribunal for Wales (SENTW).

# Individual Education Plan (IEP)

Children and young people with special educational needs (SEN) will usually have an IEP if their needs are such that they need a more specialist or targeted intervention.

State the learning goals for a child or young person and the resources that will be needed to help them to get there.

Drawn up by the SENCO and the class teacher, and the child or young person whenever possible, and sometimes the parents or carers.



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## **Engaging with schools**

- ✓ Close and two-way communication
- ✓ Whole team around the child
- ✓ Don't be shy!
- ✓ You can initiate contact
- ✓ Advocate and celebrate
- ✓ Check in with DT



## What to do if there is a problem

Work alongside the **child's social worker** and the looked after **children's education co-ordinator (LACE)**.

First of all, raise it with the school through the **designated teacher**.

Follow this up by meeting with the **class or form teacher** and the **SENCO**.

If concerns are not resolved through discussions with the teacher, make a complaint to the **governing body**.

Should things remain unresolved then all local authorities will have a **disagreement resolution service** you can take your concerns to.



# Attendance, punctuality and truancy

Children and young people must attend school regularly and on time.

Poor school attendance can have significant consequences

Truancy matters because:

- Research tells us that children and young people with even low levels of absenteeism don't do as well in tests, assessments and exams.
- Being out of school during school hours provide opportunities for access to activities that are not positive for their development
- Truancy is often symptomatic of a more serious underlying problem



## Truancy – What can you do?

- ✓ Get to know their school week and the lessons/teachers they feel most comfortable with, and those they do not.
- ✓ Look for patterns – times/days/sickness
- ✓ Are they doing homework and showing engagement?
- ✓ Talk to them regularly and ask about lessons – feelings and learning
- ✓ Make as many positive links with the school as possible and check your foster child's school routine regularly.



# School Exclusions

- ✓ All schools should have a policy which promotes good behaviour and prevents poor behaviour.
- ✓ Policies should be based on clear values, such as respect and fairness, and set out how rewards and sanctions are used to encourage positive behaviour and regular attendance.
- ✓ A school's can exclude a child or young person for a defined period or permanently,
- ✓ Only the head teacher, or an agreed representative, can sanction exclusions.

# Three types of exclusions

- **Internal exclusion** – where a child or young person may be removed from class but not excluded from the school premises. (does not count as a formal exclusion).
- **A fixed term exclusion** – which will normally be for a short period of one to three days. A child or young person can be excluded for one or more fixed-terms not exceeding 45 school days in any one school year.
- **Permanent exclusion** – this is very serious and the child or young person cannot return to that school, unless reinstated by the school's discipline committee or by an appeal panel.

For longer periods, when the total in a year reaches 45 days, or permanent exclusion, a discipline committee made up of school governors meets to review and agree the decision.



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# **Pastoral Support Programme (PSP)**

There are times when a child or young person may be identified as being at risk of permanent exclusion. PSP should be drawn up to try to prevent this happening.

Focus on the behaviour that is putting the child or young person at risk, and include consideration of any SEN, so the SENCO should be consulted when writing it.

Other people involved might include an education psychologist, education welfare officer, behaviour support specialist, the designated person and the child's social worker.

Good practice to involve the child, and often the parent or foster carer, particularly as a home/school contract might be one strategy that is included.



## Effective meetings

- Be an advocate for the child, a positive voice, be clear what the purpose of the meeting is and what outcome you want.
- Take someone with you to help make sure that everything gets covered – and remembered.
- Be prepared. Make a note of what you want to say, and to ask, and how you might deal with any areas of disagreement.
- Look for common ground. The people present will want the child or young person to succeed. Find the things you can agree on and build from there.
- Ask for specific examples, of both good and bad events. Generalisations could arise from stereotyping or prejudice.



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## Post 16

- ✓ Pathway plan – early discussion of post 16 choices
- ✓ Providing choice (including specialist provision) and letting them lead
- ✓ Based on young person's abilities, interests and aspirations
- ✓ Transition to adulthood

As our foster child moves towards independence their social worker will work with them to create a Pathway Plan which includes their long term aspirations and career goals. As a foster carer, I work with the young person's social worker to make sure the plan reflects what the young person wants to do with their life. It should set out in detail what support the local authority will provide. Sometimes if it's not written down it might be difficult to access the agreed support later on.



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## **When I Am Ready**

**When I Am Ready** recognises that continued stability can be essential to achievement.

It is a way for an agreement to be made under which a young person, although no longer legally in care, can continue to live with foster carers, usually until at least 21, and sometimes beyond, particularly where they have yet to complete a course such as a degree.

*When I am Ready: planning transition to adulthood for care leavers.*





## Its not all about 'qualifications'...

Whilst we may want every child to leave school with a broad range of qualifications and a place at university, or an exciting job lined up, for some this will prove elusive.

But, there is still a lot to be gained from time in school such as;

- developing an appreciation of learning,
- a positive attitude not only towards the process of acquiring skills and knowledge,
- confidence and belief that it is something you can do.

School can offer stability at times of uncertainty, in a life of highly disruptive ups and downs, moves and transfers, unfinished plans and broken promises.

It may also provide the chance to socialise, to make friends, and to learn to deal with adults who are consistent and committed, trusting and trustworthy.

# Case Study: Fostering Potential

- Foster Carer Training
- Specialist Masterclasses
- Direct work with schools
- Young Ambassadors
- Education Champions

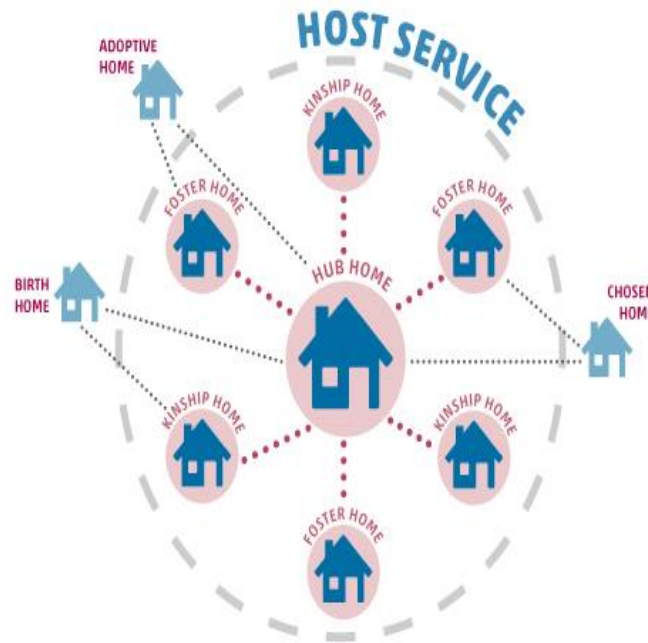
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# Case Study: The Mockingbird Family Model



  
The  
Mockingbird  
Society

Improving foster care &  
Ending youth homelessness

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# Further information:

## Head, Heart, Hands

<https://www.thefosteringnetwork.org.uk/policy-practice/head-heart-hands>

## London Fostering Achievement/Fostering Potential

<https://www.londonfosteringachievement.org.uk/>

## The Mockingbird Family Model

<https://www.thefosteringnetwork.org.uk/policy-practice/projects-and-programmes/mockingbird-family-model>

## Fostering Achievement

<https://www.thefosteringnetwork.org.uk/policy-practice/projects-and-programmes/fostering-achievement>

## Confidence in Care

<https://www.thefosteringnetwork.org.uk/policy-practice/projects-and-programmes/confidence-in-care>

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## About us

The Fostering Network is the UK's leading fostering charity. By working with foster families, and the services that support them, we help everyone who is fostered to achieve the very best they can.

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